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The Buddha's Last Bequest

A Translation
from the
Chinese Tipiṭaka



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The Buddha's Last Bequest

Introduction

The short discourse of Lord Buddha presented here cannot be found within the voluminous pages of the Pāli Canon, but so much are its teachings in accord with the canonical tradition there that it deserves to be more widely known. This Sutta, perhaps originally known by some such name as "*Buddha Pacchimovāda Parinibbāna Sutta*," has reached us only through the Chinese translation of Ācārya Kumārajīva (died B.E. 956 = 412 C.E.) while the Sanskrit (?) original used by him has long since been lost. It may be taken as another example of what may well be called 'Root-dhamma'; that is, the Teachings fundamental to all Buddhist traditions.

We are fortunate that in English three translations of this brief discourse have appeared. The first was that of Chu Ch'an, published with other short discourses by the Buddhist Society, London, in 1947 and entitled "The Sutra of 42 Sections and Other Scriptures." The other is a small hard-covered booklet called "The Last Word," translated by Mr. P. K. Eidmann and published privately in Japan by Mr. Koyata Yamamoto in the 27th year of Showa. Both translations have their merits, as can be seen by matching them, the former being more explanatory and therefore

expanding somewhat on the substance to arrive at the meaning, while the latter stays close to the Chinese original, which is evidently very concise in a number of places. I have also consulted the version of Dr. Chou Hsiang-Kuang, with the Chinese text, which was published in Calcutta in 1961, and copies were sent to me through the kindness of the editor of "The Golden Lotus." This translation I have used for altering a few phrases in my own version, but as, in that third translation, the meaning sometimes remains obscure, I have not been able to make much use of it. The three translators have respectively entitled this Sutra: "The Sutra of the Doctrine Bequeathed by the Buddha" (Chu Ch'an), "The Sutra of the Teachings Left by the Buddha" (Eidmann), and "The Sutra of the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching" (Chou).

The version given here is mainly the result of comparing the first two translations and then selecting the better rendering both from the point of view of Buddhist meaning and from that of English style. The resulting work has been checked by the Venerable Yen Kiet against the Chinese original and he has made a number of valuable suggestions for improvement as well as correction. We are particularly indebted to him for his re-translation of the final paragraph, in which the two existing renderings differed widely. The redactor has been particularly exercised to use the best equivalents possible of Buddhist technical terms, though few of these appear in this discourse. There will always remain a hard core of these terms which cannot be

adequately translated into English, and since it is the policy of modern translations to leave these in the original, this has been done with a few words here. Mr. Eidmann, translator of the edition called "*The Last Word*," has the following note at the end of the booklet:

"This is a Parinirvāna Sūtra. It is not, however, the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, though it has parallels to many of its teachings, while the Sanskrit or Pāli original is now no longer known. This Sūtra is No. 122 in the Nañjio Catalogue of the Chinese Tripiṭaka, and will be found in Volume 12, No. 389, in the Taisho edition of the Tripiṭaka."

The section headings used in "*The Last Word*," the work of the commentator Ven. Tao-An of the Eastern Tsin Dynasty, have been retained here as useful additions (except the last three which divide the text needlessly). Regarding the content of these sections, a few apply almost only to the life of homeless Bhikkhus (such as: II. 1; 3; 6; III. 3) but even here the layman who is advised to emulate Bhikkhu-life (as on Uposatha-days, times of meditative retreat or during temporary ordination as Bhikkhu or Sāmaṇera), will find here good advice for such occasions. Although all sections, indeed the whole Sutta, is addressed to Bhikkhus, much sound advice is here as well for the lay person.

This brings to mind an important point. Those who do not know the Dhamma well—and sometimes those opposed to it—may quote such passages as: 'Seek the joy of quietness

and passivity ... ,’ and such advice can be found in plenty in the Pāli Canon, and then proceed to rear a great edifice of criticism upon their text, saying that Buddhism teaches that one should go to the forest, want little, be contented ... and so forth, deducing from this that Dhamma is of no use to the layman and a hindrance to the progress of civilization Like all criticism upon texts torn from their context, it is invalid. This sort of advice is given to Bhikkhus and can apply to lay people only during the special times mentioned above. It is the greatest nonsense to suppose that the teachings given by Lord Buddha to Bhikkhus (and Bhikkhunīs) on the one hand, and to lay devotees on the other, were the same. He knew well the capacity and opportunity of people and taught them accordingly: Bhikkhus with Dhamma suitable to their lives and aspirations, lay devotees with that Dhamma suited to their more social and often more turbulent lives. To confuse one with the other is to show ignorance of the vast mass of teachings given by the Blessed One to lay people. A rough estimate of the number of discourses addressed by him to the laity, or else those containing valuable advice for lay Buddhist life, would be about 400.

Apart from the direct benefits which careful reading of this short discourse will bring, lay people will also gain a good picture of the Bhikkhu-life well lived. Now that Bhikkhus are to be found here and there in increasing numbers outside the traditionally Buddhist countries, it is well that lay Buddhists appreciate something of the standards of their

life. Of course, not all will come up to the perfection of conduct set forth here, but if one does know of one such Bhikkhu, then one has in him the true Noble Friend (kalyāṇa-mitta). If one does not know of such a Bhikkhu, then let the discourse be a pointer to the directions for one's own growth in Dhamma. Here in this discourse is good food, whether one be a Bhikkhu or a householder. So highly indeed is this Sutta rated in China that it is one of the first texts which the new Bhikkhu is given to read and instructed in by his teachers. It is also printed in a very cheap edition in Bangkok and elsewhere so as to be widely available among the Chinese lay people with whom, the writer understands, it is very popular.

The present compiler would like to add the testimonies, one ancient and the other modern, upon this discourse, and then let these words of Lord Buddha summon one to the practice of the Dhamma.

First, let us listen to part of the Imperial Edict concerning the wide promulgation of the discourse of the Buddha's last exhortation, issued by His Imperial Majesty T'ai Tsung of the T'ang Dynasty (from Chu Ch'an's translation):

“(This discourse) ... contains the words spoken by the Buddha to admonish and encourage his disciples, when on the point of entering Nirvana. It is indeed an excellent summary of essentials and by no means just a common piece of paper covered with black (ink). If it is not received and treated with respect, the great way will be obscured and

the subtle words perish. Forever cherish its sacred doctrine! Bestow much thought upon it, in order to draw out and expand its meaning!”

Next, the publisher Mr. Koyata Yamamoto has written: “Once I asked (the nun superior of Shisendo Temple) to conduct a memorial service for Hisaya, my second son, who perished in the last war. In the middle of the chanting I heard the words: “Those having many desires ... experience much dukkha. Those with few desires ... do not experience such dukkha.” These words hit me like a bolt of lightning and, after the service, I asked for the name of the Sūtra. I was given, in reply, an old and worn copy of the Sūtra of the Buddha’s last exhortation. Thereafter, I spent every spare moment reading this Sūtra and have become convinced that there is no Sūtra more stirring or more simple.”

Finally, these are words of Mr. Ruikotsu Madani, written in his Foreword: “I am now 84 years old. My whole life has been dedicated to this single, narrow, ancient way. I hope that through the publication of this Sūtra on the Buddha’s last exhortations, the hearts and minds of many will be opened.”

Evam.

May it be so.

Bhikkhu Khantipālo,
Wat Bovoranives Vihara,

Bangkok.

The Discourse of the Teaching Bequeathed by the Buddha (just before His Parinibbāna)

Translated into Chinese by the Indian Ācārya
Kumārajīva sometime prior to the year 956
Buddhist Era.

I. Occasion [1]

When Lord Buddha, sage of the Sākyas, first turned the Wheel of the Dhamma, Venerable Aññākondañña crossed over (the ocean of birth and death); while as a result of his last Discourse [2] Venerable Subhadda crossed over likewise. All those who were (ready) to cross over, then he (helped) to cross over. When about to attain Final Nibbāna, he was lying between the twin sāla trees in the middle watch of the night. No sound disturbed the calm and silence; then, for the sake of the disciples (*sāvaka*), he spoke briefly on the essentials of Dhamma:

II. On the Cultivation of Virtue in this World

1. Exhortation on Keeping the Precepts

“O Bhikkhus, after my Parinibbāna you should reverence and honour the precepts of the Pātimokkha. [3] Treat them as a light which you have discovered in the dark, or as a poor man would treat a treasure found by him. You should know that they are your chief guide and there should be no difference (in your observance of them) from when I yet remained in the world. If you would maintain in purity the precepts, you should not give yourselves over to buying, selling or barter. You should not covet fields or buildings, nor accumulate servants, attendants or animals. [4] You should flee from all sorts of property and wealth as you would avoid a fire or a pit. You should not cut down grass or trees, neither break new soil nor plough the earth. Nor may you compound medicines, practise divination or sorcery according to the position of the stars, cast horoscopes by the waxing and waning of the moon, nor reckon days of good fortune. All these are things which are improper (for a Bhikkhu).

“Conduct yourselves in purity, eating only at the proper times and living your lives in purity and

solitude. You should not concern yourselves with worldly affairs, nor yet circulate rumours. You should not mumble incantations, mix magic potions, nor bind yourselves in friendship to powerful persons, showing to them and the rich (special) friendliness while treating with contempt those lacking (in worldly wealth, power and so forth). All such things are not to be done!

“You should seek, with a steadfast mind, [5] and with Right Mindfulness (sammā sati), for Enlightenment. Neither conceal your faults (within), nor work wonders (without), thereby leading (yourself and) other people astray. As to the four offerings, [6] be content with them, knowing what is sufficient. Receive them when offered but do not hoard them. This, briefly, is what is meant by observing the precepts. These precepts are fundamental (to a life based on Dhamma-Vinaya) and accord exactly with freedom (mokkha), and so are called the Pātimokkha. By relying on them you may attain all levels of collectedness (samādhi) and likewise the knowledge of the extinction of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness). [7] It is for this reason, Bhikkhus, that you should always maintain the precepts in purity and never break them. If you can keep these precepts pure you possess an excellent (method for the attainment of Enlightenment), but if you do not do so, no merit of any kind will accrue to you. You ought to know for

this reason that the precepts are the chief dwelling-place of the merit which results in both body and mind (citta) being at rest.

2. Exhortation on the Control of Mind and Body

“O Bhikkhus, if you are able already to keep within the precepts, you must next control the five senses, not permitting the entry of the five sense desires [8] by your unrestraint, just as a cowherd by taking and showing his stick prevents cows from entering another’s field, ripe for the harvest. In an evil-doer indulging the five senses, his five desires will not only exceed all bounds but will become uncontrollable, just as a wild horse unchecked by the bridle must soon drag the man leading it, into a pit. If a man be robbed, his sorrow does not extend beyond the period of his life but the evil of that robber (sense desires) and the depredations caused by him bring calamities extending over many lives, creating very great dukkha. You should control yourselves!

“Hence, wise men control themselves and do not indulge their senses but guard them like robbers who must not be allowed freedom from restraint. If you do allow them freedom from restraint, before long you will be destroyed by Māra. [9] The mind is the lord of the five senses and for this reason you should well control the mind. Indeed, you ought to fear indulgence of the mind’s (desires) more than

poisonous snakes, savage beasts, dangerous robbers or fierce conflagrations. No simile is strong enough to illustrate (this danger). But think of a man carrying a jar of honey who, as he goes, heeds only the honey and is unaware of a deep pit (in his path!) Or think of a mad elephant unrestrained by shackles! Again, consider a monkey who after climbing a tree cannot, except with difficulty, be controlled! Such as these would be difficult to check: therefore hasten to control your desires and do not let them go unrestrained! Indulge the mind (with its desires) and you lose the benefit of being born a man; check it completely and there is nothing you will be unable to accomplish. That is the reason, O Bhikkhus, why you should strive hard to subdue your minds.

3. Exhortation on the Moderate Use of Food

“O Bhikkhus, in receiving all sorts of food and drink, you should regard them as though you are taking medicine. Whether they be good or bad, do not accept or reject them according to your likes and dislikes; just use them to support your bodies, thereby staying free from hunger and thirst. As bees while foraging among flowers extract only the nectar, without harming their colour and scent, just so, O Bhikkhus, should you do (when collecting alms-food). Accept just enough of what people offer to you, for the avoidance of distress. But do not ask for much and thereby spoil the goodness of their hearts,

just as the wise man, having estimated the strength of his ox, does not wear out its strength by overloading.

4. Exhortation on Sleeping

“O Bhikkhus, by day you should practise good Dhamma and not allow yourselves to waste time. In the early evening and late at night do not cease to make an effort, while in the middle of the night you should chant the Suttas to make yourselves better informed. Do not allow yourselves to pass your lives in vain and fruitlessly, on account of sleep. You should envisage the world as being consumed by a great fire and quickly determine to save yourselves from it. Do not (spend much time in) sleep! ^[10] The robbers of the three afflictions ^[11] forever lie in wait to kill men so that (your danger) is even greater than in a household rent by hatred. So, fearful, how can you sleep and not arouse yourselves? These afflictions are a poisonous snake asleep in your own hearts. They are like a black cobra sleeping in your room. Destroy the snake quickly with the sharp spear of keeping the precepts! Only when that dormant snake has been driven away will you be able to rest peacefully. If you sleep, not having driven it away, you are men without shame (ahiri). The clothing of shame (hiri), among all ornaments, is the very best. Shame can also be compared to an iron goad that can control all human wrong-doing; for which reason, O Bhikkhus, you should always feel ashamed of

unskilful actions (akusalakamma). You should not be without it even for a moment, for if you are parted from shame, all merits will be lost to you. He who has fear of blame (ottappa) has that which is good, while he who has no fear of blame (anottappa) is not different from the birds and beasts.

5. Exhortation on Refraining from Anger and Ill-will

“O Bhikkhus, if there were one who came and dismembered you joint by joint, you should not hate him but rather include him in your heart (of friendliness—mettā). Besides, you should guard your speech and refrain from reviling him. If you succumb to thoughts of hatred you block your own (progress in) Dhamma and lose the benefits of (accumulated) merits. Patience (khanti) is a virtue which cannot be equalled even by keeping the precepts and (undertaking) the austere practices. ^[12] Whosoever is able to practise patience can be truly called a great and strong man, but he who is unable to endure abuse as happily as though he were drinking ambrosia, cannot be called one who has attained knowledge of Dhamma. Why is this? The harm caused by anger and resentment shatters all your goodness and so (greatly) spoils your good name that neither present nor future generations of men will wish to hear it. You should know that angry thoughts are more terrible than a great fire. So continually guard yourselves against them and do not let them

gain entrance. Among the three robbers (the afflictions), none steals merit more than anger and resentment. Those householders dressed in white who have desires and practise little Dhamma, in them, having no way of controlling themselves, anger may still be excusable; but among those who become homeless (pabbajita) because they wish to practise Dhamma and to abandon desire, the harbouring of anger and resentment is scarcely to be expected, just as one does not look for thunder or lightning from a translucent, filmy cloud.

6. Exhortation on Refraining from Arrogance and Contempt

“O Bhikkhus, rubbing your heads ^[13] you should deeply consider yourselves in this way: ‘It is good that I have discarded personal adornment. I wear the russet robe of patches and carry a bowl with which to sustain life.’ When thoughts of arrogance or contempt arise, you must quickly destroy them by regarding yourselves in this way. The growth of arrogance and contempt is not proper among those wearing white and living the household life: how much less so for you, gone forth to homelessness! You should subdue your bodies, collecting food (in your bowls) for the sake of Dhamma-practice to realize Enlightenment.

7. Exhortation on Flattery

“O Bhikkhus, a mind inclined to flattery is incompatible with Dhamma; therefore, it is right to examine and correct such a mind. You should know that flattery is nothing but deception, so that those who have entered the way of Dhamma practice have no use for it. For this reason, be sure to examine and correct the errors of the mind, for to do so is fundamental.

III. On the Advantages for Great Men Gone Forth to Homelessness

1. The Virtue of Few Wishes

“O Bhikkhus, you should know that those having many desires, by reason of their desire for selfish profit, experience much dukkha. Those with few desires, neither desiring nor seeking anything, do not therefore experience such dukkha. Straight-away lessen your desires! Further, in order to obtain all kinds of merit you should practise ‘fewness’ of desires. Those who desire little, do not indulge in flattery so as to sway another’s mind, nor are they led by their desires. Those who practise the diminishing of desires thus achieve a mind of contentment having no cause for either grief or fear, and finding the things they receive are sufficient, never suffer from

want. From this cause indeed, (comes) Nibbāna. Such is the meaning of 'having few wishes.'

2. The Virtue of Contentment.

“O Bhikkhus, if you wish to escape from all kinds of dukkha, you must see that you are contented. The virtue of contentment is the basis of abundance, happiness, peace and seclusion. Those who are contented are happy even though they have to sleep on the ground. Those who are not contented would not be so though they lived in celestial mansions. Such people feel poor even though they are rich, while those who are contented are rich even in poverty. [14] The former are constantly led by their five desires and are greatly pitied by the contented. Such is the meaning of 'contentment.'

3. The Virtue of Seclusion

“O Bhikkhus, seek the joy of quietness and passivity. Avoid confusion and noise and dwell alone in secluded places. Those who dwell in solitude are worshipped with reverence by Sakka and all celestials. [15] This is why you should leave your own and other clans to live alone in quiet places, reflecting (to develop insight) upon dukkha, its arising and its cessation. Those who rejoice in the pleasures of company must bear as well the pains of company, as when many birds flock to a great tree it may wither and collapse. Attachment to worldly things immerses

one in the dukkha experienced by all men, like an old elephant bogged down in a swamp from which he cannot extricate himself. Such is the meaning of 'secluding oneself.'

4. The virtue of energetic striving

"O Bhikkhus, if you strive diligently, nothing will be difficult for you. As a little water constantly trickling can bore a hole through a rock, so must you always strive energetically. If the mind of a disciple (sāvaka) becomes idle and inattentive, he will resemble one who tries to make fire by friction but rests before the heat is sufficient. However much he desires fire, he cannot (make even a spark). Such is the meaning of 'energetic striving.'

5. The Virtue of Attentiveness

"O Bhikkhus, seek out a noble friend (kalyāṇa-mitta). Seek him who will best (be able to) aid you (in developing) the unexcelled and unbroken attention. **[16]** If you are attentive, none of the (three) robbers, the afflictions, can enter your mind. That is why you must keep your mind in a state of constant attention, for by loss of attention you lose all merits. If your power of attention is very great, though you fall among (conditions favouring) the five robbers of sense-desire, you will not be harmed by them, just as a warrior entering a battle well-covered by armour has nothing to fear. Such is the meaning of 'unbroken

attention.’

6. The Virtue of ‘Collectedness’ (samādhi)

“O Bhikkhus, if you guard your mind, so guarded the mind will remain in a state of collectedness. If your minds are in a state of collectedness, you will be able to understand the arising and passing away of the impermanent world. For this reason you should strive constantly to practise the various stages of absorption (jhāna). When one of these states of collectedness is reached, the mind no longer wanders. A disciple who practises (to attain collectedness) is just like an irrigator who properly regulates his dykes. As he guards water, even a small amount, so should you guard the water of wisdom, thereby preventing it from leaking away. Such is the meaning of ‘collectedness.’

7. The Virtue of Wisdom

“O Bhikkhus, if you have wisdom, then do not hunger to make a display of it. Ever look within yourselves so that you do not fall into any fault. In this way you will be able to attain freedom from (the tangle of) the interior and exterior (spheres of senses and sense-objects—*āyatana*). ^[17] If you do not accomplish this you cannot be called Dhamma ‘practisers,’ nor yet are you common persons clad in white, so there will be no name to fit you! Wisdom is a firmly-bound raft which will ferry you across the

ocean of birth, old age, sickness and death. Again, it is a brilliant light with which to dispel the black obscurity of ignorance. It is a good medicine for all who are ill. It is a sharp axe for cutting down the strangling fig-tree of the afflictions. That is why you should, by the hearing-wisdom, thinking-wisdom and development-wisdom [18] increase your benefits (from Dhamma). If you have Insight (vipassanā) stemming from (development-wisdom,) though your eyes are but fleshly organs you will be able to see clearly (into your own citta) [19] . Such is the meaning of 'wisdom.'

8. The Virtue of Restraint from Idle Talk

“O Bhikkhus, if you indulge in all sorts of idle discussions then your mind will be full of chaotic thoughts, and though you have gone forth to homelessness you will be unable to attain Freedom. That is why, O Bhikkhus, you should immediately cease from chaotic thoughts and idle discussions. If you want to attain the happiness of Nibbāna, you must eliminate completely the illness of idle discussion. [20]

IV. Self Exertion

“O Bhikkhus, as regards all kinds of virtue, you

should ever rid yourselves of laxity, as you would flee from a hateful robber. That Dhamma which the greatly-compassionate Lord has taught for your benefit is now concluded, but it is for you to strive diligently to practise this teaching. Whether you live in the mountains or on the great plains, whether you sojourn beneath a tree or in your own secluded dwellings, bear in mind the Dhamma you have received and let none of it be lost. You should always exert yourselves in practising it diligently, lest you die after wasting a whole lifetime and come to regret it afterwards. I am like a good doctor, who, having diagnosed the complaint, prescribes some medicine; but whether it is taken or not, does not depend on the doctor. Again, I am like a good guide who points out the best road; but if, having heard of it, (the enquirer) does not take it, the fault is not with the guide.

V. On Clearing Up All Doubts

“O Bhikkhus, if you have any doubts regarding the Four Noble Truths; of unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and the rest, (its arising, its cessation and the practice-path leading to its cessation), you should ask about them at once. Do not harbour such doubts without seeking to resolve them.”

On that occasion the Lord spoke thus three times; yet there were none who questioned him. And why was that? Because there were none in that assembly (of Bhikkhus) who harboured any doubts. [21]

Then the Venerable Anuruddha, seeing what was in the minds of those assembled, respectfully addressed the Buddha thus: “Lord, the moon may grow hot and the sun may become cold, but the Four Noble Truths proclaimed by the Lord cannot be otherwise. The Truth of Dukkha taught by the Lord describes real dukkha which cannot become happiness. The accumulation of desires truly is the cause of the Arising of Dukkha; there can never be a different cause. If dukkha is destroyed (the Cessation of Dukkha), it is because the cause of dukkha has been destroyed, for if the cause is destroyed the result must also be destroyed. The Practice path leading to the cessation of dukkha is the true path, nor can there be other. Lord, all these Bhikkhus are certain and have no doubts about the Four Noble Truths.

In this assembly, those who have not yet done what should be done (i.e. attained Enlightenment), will, on seeing the Lord attain Final Nibbāna, certainly feel sorrowful. (Among them) those who have newly entered upon the Dhamma-way [22] and who have heard what the Lord has (just said), they will all reach Enlightenment (in due course) seeing Dhamma clearly as a flash of lightning in the dark the night.

But is there anyone who has done what should be done (being an Arahant), already having crossed over the ocean of dukkha who will think thus: "The Lord has attained Final Nibbāna; why was this done so quickly?"

Although the Venerable Anuruddha had thus spoken these words, and the whole assembly had penetrated the meaning of the Four Noble Truths still the Lord wished to strengthen all that great assembly. With a mind of infinite compassion he spoke (again) for their benefit.

"O Bhikkhus, do not feel grieved. If I were to live in the world for a whole aeon (kappa), my association with you would still come to an end, since a meeting with no parting is an impossibility. The Dhamma is now complete for each and every one. So even if I were to live longer it would be of no benefit at all. Those who were (ready) to cross over, both among the celestials and men, have all without exception attained Enlightenment, while those who have not yet completed their crossing (of the ocean of saṃsāra to the Further Shore or Nibbāna) have already produced the necessary causes (to enable them to do so in course of time).

"From now on, all my disciples must continue to practise (in this way) without ceasing, whereby the body of the Tathāgata's Dhamma will be everlasting

and indestructible. But as to the world, nothing there is eternal, so that all meetings must be followed by partings. Hence, do not harbour grief, for such (impermanence) is the nature of worldly things. But do strive diligently and quickly seek out freedom. With the light of perfect wisdom destroy the darkness of ignorance, for in this world is nothing strong or enduring.

“Now that I am about to attain final Nibbāna, it is like being rid of a terrible sickness. This body is a thing of which we are indeed well rid, an evil thing falsely going by the name of self and sunk in the ocean birth, disease, old age and death. Can a wise man do aught but rejoice when he is able to rid himself of it, as others might (be glad), when slaying a hateful robber?

“O Bhikkhus, you should always exert the mind seeking the way out (of the wandering-on, or saṃsāra). All forms in the world, without exception, whether moving or non-moving, are subject to decay and followed by destruction. All of you should stop. **[23]** It is needless to speak again. Time is passing away. I wish to cross over to Freedom (from existence in this world). These are my very last instructions.”

* * * * *

To these stirring words we may add the similar last words

found in the Pāli text of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta:

“Handa ’dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo: Vayadhammā saṅkhārā; appamādena sampādetha’ti!”

Which may be translated:

“Listen well, O Bhikkhus, I exhort you: Subject to decay are all compounded things; with heedfulness strive on.”

Notes

1. Probably the comment of Ācārya Kumārajīva.
2. See “*The Wheel*” Nos. 17 (for the first discourse) and 67/69 (for the last).
3. The 227 Fundamental Rules of training for Bhikkhus (Buddhist monks). See “*The Pātimokkha*”. Pāli text in Roman characters and English translation (Bangkok 1966, Social Science Press of Thailand). The Chinese text refers to the Chinese *Prātimokṣa* of 250 Rules.
4. This doubtless refers to animals as property, such as cattle, etc. In ancient India wealth was measured by the possession of cows, horses and other livestock.
5. *Citta*. Although most conveniently translated as ‘mind’ one should remember that the term includes *feelings, perceptions, volitional activities* and *consciousness*.
6. Lay people offer Buddhist monks and nuns: robes, food, shelter and medical necessities. These are the four supports of a Bhikkhu’s life.
7. Although *dukkha* is often rendered by ‘suffering,’ this may cause misunderstanding, since it by no means conveys the full scope or force of the Pāli *dukkha*. Any

experience, gross or subtle, mental or physical, which is unsatisfactory in some way, is *dukkha*. See The **Wheel No. 34/35**, *The Four Noble Truths*.

8. *Kilesa kāma*: the mental defilement by desire for the five sense-objects.
9. *Māra*: symbolic of desires and consequent birth and death; hence of evil. Five sorts of *Māra* are distinguished: *Māra* as mental stains, as death, as volitional activities, as the five aggregates, and as a celestial being. Here the first is meant.
10. Although the Chinese text does not have in it the bracketed words, still these are essential since sleep can only be completely dispensed with for short periods of intense meditation. See the oft-repeated passage in the Suttas on sleeping: “Come you, monks, dwell intent on vigilance; during the day while pacing up and down, while sitting down, cleanse the mind of obstructive mental states; during the middle watch of the night, lie down on the right side in the lion posture, foot resting on foot, mindful, clearly conscious, reflecting on the thought of getting up again; during the last watch of the night, when you have risen, while pacing up and down, while sitting down, cleanse the mind of obstructive mental states.”
11. *Greed* (what I want and like), *hatred* (what I do not want and dislike), and *delusion* (what I do not know and I do not want to know).

- 12.** *Dhūtaṅga*: for an outline of the practice of these 13 allowable austerities, a few of which can also be practised by lay people, see The **Wheel No. 83/84**, *With Robes and Bowl*.
- 13.** Implying reflection.
- 14.** Contentment is specially taught to Bhikkhus, while lay people, though also cultivating it, are not expected to practise it to the same extent. Note the striking lines in the poem of Sir Edward Dyer: My mind to me a kingdom is:
- Some have too much, yet still do crave;
I little have, and seek no more,
They are but poor though much they have,
And I am rich with little store.
They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;
They lack, I leave; they pine, I live.
- 15.** *Devā* literally 'shining ones.' These beings are born to celestial delights as fruit of their excellent kamma, but theirs, like all life, is impermanent. See *Bodhi Leaves B. 4, Of Gods and Men*. Sakka (another name for Indra) is their ruler in the realms of desire.
- 16.** A teacher of meditation.
- 17.** *Āyatana*. So far the Sutta has referred only to five senses and five sense-objects; i.e., ten sensorial fields (*Āyatanāni*). But there are altogether twelve *Āyatanāni*, the mind (as sixth sense) and mental objects being included. It is specifically the mind and ideas that are dealt with in this

section.

18. Hearing-wisdom: learning from teachers or from books, implies developed memory. Thinking-wisdom: reflecting on what has been learnt, implies logical and intellectual development. Development-wisdom: arising from development of the *citta*, means insight and transcendental wisdom not got by intellectual growth alone, nor to be confused with the so-called “intuition.” In Pāli the three are: *suta-māya-paññā*, *cinta-māya-paññā* and *bhāvanā-māya-paññā*.
19. The Pāli *citta* is retained here because “seeing clearly into one’s own *citta*” means knowing the nature of all the mental phenomena: feelings, perceptions, volitional activities and consciousness. See note 5. The passage looks to Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, MN 11, et seq. See **The Wheel No.19: *The Foundations of Mindfulness***.
20. This is also translated as “sophisticated arguments,” (Dr. Chou) and would thus seem to include that futile kind of discussion about Nibbāna, Suññata, etc., which some are fond of engaging in.
21. The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (see *The Last Days of the Buddha*, BP 213) states that all in that assembly were at least Stream-enterers, who had therefore destroyed scepticisms (*vicikicchā*), since they had seen with wisdom (*pañña*) the Goal of Dhamma: Nibbāna.
22. The Stream enterers—*sotāpanna*.

23. This brief and cryptic phrase may mean in this context: You should stop yourselves from being involved in the world of birth and death: Stop revolving in saṃsāra. It recalls the Aṅgulimāla Sutta, where the Buddha used the exhortation with dramatic effect when Aṅgulimāla, in vain pursuit, called upon him to stand still: “I am standing still, Aṅgulimāla. Do you also stand still!” (MN 86)

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